Wood Duck Nest Box Construction
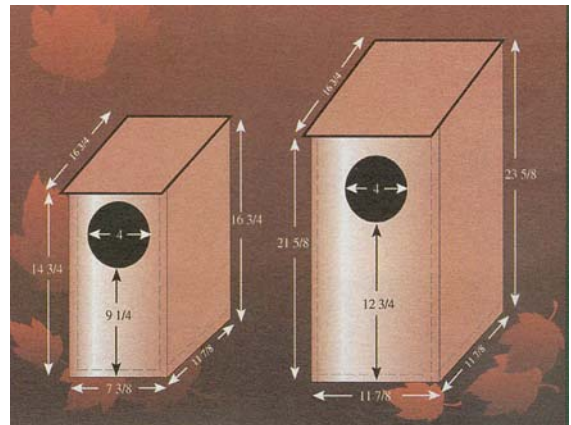
HISTORY: Twenty-six species of ducks are found in coastal and inland waters of Alabama. The wood duck is the resident species found statewide throughout the year due, in part, to use of wood duck nest boxes as a wildlife management tool for over half a century.

MATERIALS: Weather resistant lumber such as cypress or cedar is the optimal material to use; although treated pine is an acceptable alternative. Hinge the lid for easy maintenance; use a screen door latch to keep it shut.

PLACEMENT: Placing numerous nest boxes close together in easily accessible areas may attract predators and decrease duckling survival. One wood duck box per half mile of shoreline is adequate.

Place boxes over water on a 4" x 4" wooden post or a metal pipe above high water level but accessible for easy maintenance. Bore four ½ inch holes through the box for drainage.

Do not place next to trees or overhanging shrubs. Ducklings need adequate escape cover for survival, therefore areas containing dense shrubs along the banks such as buttonbush or willow in mature bottomland hardwoods or cypress swamps are optimal areas to place wood duck boxes. Erect boxes in early winter before hens begin to search for nest sites.

PREDATOR SHIELDS: Raccoons and many snake species are responsible for destruction of many wood duck nests. Proper precautions should be taken to prevent nest disturbance. Predator shields are crucial to reduce nest box predation. They consist of a cone shaped piece of sheet metal, a minimum of thirty inches in diameter. Place shields a minimum of 2-3 feet below the nest box to reduce predation from snakes.

MAINTENANCE: Clean boxes annually in early winter before wood ducks begin nesting, which can occur as early as late January. Before nesting season, add approximately 2-3 inches of sawdust or wood shavings to the bottom of the box. This substitutes for decaying wood the hen normally uses when building a nest in a cavity.

Source: Research Advances Forest and Wildlife Research Center, Mississippi State University